

DATE: November 18, 1976

TO : File

FROM : Joshua Lederberg

SUBJECT: Conversation with Phil Cohen in re E.L. Tatum / *Arthur Tatum*.

It turned out that Phil Cohen was one of the people at the ERDA Conference on November 17, so I took the occasion to reminiscence with him about Ed Tatum.

*(Prof. Physiol. Chem., Med School)*  
Phil had been at Wisconsin continuously since 1929 and so knew Ed and his family rather well if not intimately.

I asked him about Arthur's influence on his family. He commented that Ed was too strong minded to follow directly in his father's footsteps (with the clear implication that he was under some pressure to do so). He contrasted him with his brother Howard, whom he described as a "so much of a patsy" as to go so far as to take his Ph.D. in his father's own department.

Phil's feelings about Arthur were none too kindly. In 1932 when there was a school-wide reduction of salaries of 20%, Phil was a graduate assistant and was involved in what he called a mannerly movement to try to get the cut to be graduated. When he came to see Tatum about this, he was told that the market place was going to decide that question and that was that. And besides, was it possible that he was a communist! That view seemed to have been rather widely held among other senior faculty at that time.

Phil did not think too much of the scientific imaginativeness of the elder Tatum's work either thinking it was not much more than the rote testing of arsenicals for anti-parasitic activity. At that time Arthur Tatum apparently also had a substantial income from patents on analgesics.

Evidently he had quite a reputation for high-handed behavior within the department and the medical school, too.

The most useful nugget was that E.D. Fred is still living in Madison and Phil was sure he would be delighted to share his recollection with me. Mrs. Tatum (Ed's stepmother) apparently is also still living in Madison; may have worked for the library).

Phil also mentioned that Ed had a role as President of the Harvey Society in New York later on which is another possible lead.

I asked Phil about Joe Fruton's book. Phil's comment was that he hoped it gave him some satisfaction because Joe has been quite bitter about the way he has been treated at Yale. Apparently he had been asked to be the hatchet-man in a drastic reorganization of the departments; fulfilled those responsibilities making a number of enemies in the process; and was left high and dry by the next *decadal* administration.